

Department Adjusts Classification Levels of Officer Positions

By WAYNE A. SWEDENBURG

The Department is implementing recommendations that resulted from a worldwide classification study of all Foreign Service officer positions.

This study, which is the outgrowth of Management Reform Recommendations and work of Task Force I in September-October 1970, has sought to establish a valid position classification structure for the Foreign Service. All officer positions, regardless of their location (U.S. or abroad) and pay plan (FSO, FSR, FSRU, FSSO), were individually reviewed by a professional staff of classification analysts to determine their appropriate level.

To recount briefly the reasons for this study, it will be recalled that from June 1962 until February 1971 position classification authority was delegated to major organizations of the Department.

A general escalation of grade/class levels took place during this period. This is attributable to several causes, primarily (a) pressures by management within the bureaus, (b) in some cases, the inexperience of the personnel technician responsible for position classification, (c) a tendency to project future programs or shifts in program emphasis which later failed to materialize, and/or (d) the competition between the bureaus to obtain and retain the best qualified officers—which sometimes involved placing artificially higher grades on positions to induce an officer to take an assignment.

Generous use was made of "incumbency only" allocations, and these higher levels usually remained after incumbents left.

It should not be construed from the foregoing that the various offices then having classification authority did not consistently attempt to apply proper classification principles, but rather that parochial demands were often over-riding.

The looseness in classifying Foreign Service, and to some extent Civil Service, positions during this period did, however, result in an unbalanced position structure and significant misalignment of like positions in different organizations and different geographical areas.

While some offices were conservative in their classification

ities, others were overly liberal in applying standards for job levels.

A Special Survey Group, sometimes referred to as the Hall Group, made a preliminary reclassification survey of all officer positions in the fall of 1970. In reviewing positions abroad, the Group used as a key baseline the relative demands placed on the Deputy Chief of Mission and from the baseline uniformly ranked all other positions in descending order. Positions in Washington were reviewed by application of the same concept of rank order.

When it presented its report the Group emphasized that, in meeting its term of reference, its methods may have resulted in recommendation for a greater downgrading of positions than would have been the case had functional positions and standards common to all Washington agencies been used as the base.

The Group, therefore, urged the Department to establish a professional staff to review position allocations in accordance with applicable standards and to formulate new or revised standards where warranted before implementing any broad classification changes.

Acting on these recommendations, the Department in February 1971 re-centralized the position classification function in PER under direction of the Director General of the Foreign Service and the Director of Personnel. A professional staff of classification specialists was formed which immediately undertook an in-depth study of all officer positions. The individual

review of nearly 7,000 positions has taken 18 months to complete.

Although the reclassification recommendations initially made by the Hall Group have been taken into account by the professional staff, it has relied more on following accepted principles and techniques practiced by classification organizations elsewhere in government.

The recently-completed study has, therefore, taken into consideration comparable positions in other U.S. Government agencies, published standards, including those prepared during the past two years by the staff, and internal program priorities in arriving at appropriate class levels for positions. The staff has always resolved borderline cases by deciding in favor of the higher grade.

Determining the job content of each Foreign Service officer position in the United States and abroad has been a formidable undertaking. The staff used updated position descriptions to the extent possible as well as the first page of performance reports to obtain job information.

Field trips were taken by staff members to obtain current information on specific occupational groups (e.g., consular, communications and records, and others). The staff coordinated their findings with the respective bureaus, and also consulted with the other foreign affairs agencies. The Office of Management and Budget and Civil Service Commission have been regularly apprised of the study's progress.

Although the new classification levels will appear in the Department's

State Department review completed

official staffing pattern beginning July 1, 1973, any impact of the study will be spread over the next three years. Since there has been both an upward and downward shifting of grade levels, the overall effect in implementing the study will not be overly pronounced except perhaps at the more senior levels. However, the attrition of FSO-1's and 2's at the customary annual rate should offset the effects which might otherwise appear at these levels.

The 1973 promotion list reflected the first tranche of the reclassification program. Even so, a larger number of officers were promoted this year than in 1972. Department officials anticipate that next year's list will be substantially the same.

The following illustrates the overall changes resulting from this study:

FSO-1 and 2	Reduced by 23%
FSO-3	Reduced by 6%
FSO-4 and 5	Increased by 8%
FSO-6	Increased by 17%
FSO-7 and 8	Increased by 3%

As indicated above, a number of positions at the FSO-1 and 2 levels (equivalent to supergrades), and to a lesser extent at the FSO-3 level, have been adjusted downward.

One of the reasons for this action is because many of these affected positions have historically been filled by officers holding a personal rank of one, two, or even three grades lower than the classification of the position.

More openings at FSO-4 and below, particularly at FSO-6, will afford younger officers expanded opportunities for assignments to positions of more responsibility earlier in their careers. The number of "program direction" positions at the FSO-4 level, for example, was increased over 200 percent (from 18 to 55).

Downward changes in senior position levels were more pronounced in the administration cone than in other functional activities although the political cone took more reductions at the FSO-1 level than consular, information-cultural, economic-commercial, or specialized professional groups.

An increase of 65 positions in the economic-commercial cone in grades FSO-5 through FSO-7 will offer additional opportunities for younger officers.

Whereas the greatest number of positions in the consular cone were previously classified at the FSO-7 level, the reclassification study shows that the greatest number should now be at the FSO-6 level. There will be

slightly more positions at the FSO-4 to FSO-7 level in the consular cone than before.

Increased numbers of positions at the FSO-4 and FSO-6 level in the political cone will swing the greatest number of positions in this activity from the FSO-3 level to the FSO-4 level.

The highest number of positions in the information-cultural and economic-commercial cones are also at the FSO-4 level. In fact, the FSO-4 level continues to be the most populous grade level in positions available as well as the level held as a personal grade by the greatest number of officers in the Service.

The Department does not intend that any individual employee should be adversely affected by the impact of this reclassification effort nor should there be any major realignment of work forces resulting therefrom.

What this study will provide, however, is a rational position structure base which can be used reliably for determining recruitment, training,

promotion, and other manpower needs.

It will also ensure a more consistent assignment pattern with officers more often being assigned to positions classified at the level of their own personal grade. Hence, a better matching of people and jobs will be possible with benefits accruing to both the officer and his organization.

The Department expects there will be further classification adjustments as the Position and Pay Management Division of PER, the staff responsible for this study, obtains additional information on specific positions and as program emphasis and job content change. New regulations and procedures governing the position management function will be issued in the near future.

Statistical tallies reflecting the changes are under preparation and it is planned to present them in a subsequent issue of the NEWSLETTER.

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